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ABSTRACT

The connection between service and character is a natural fit in today's schools. An important fact of school reform in recent years has been the push to connect academics to the "real world." But while there is widespread agreement that educating students to become good citizens is crucial, there are differences on how to make that goal a reality. Many educators, however, are finding that the service-learning and character development approaches go hand in hand. Following an overview, this issue paper first defines and describes character education and service-learning. The paper focuses on how service and character support each other. It discusses conflicting opinions about policy options and policy challenges. It outlines guidelines and strategies for state policymakers who wish to draft legislation about character education and service-learning. (Contains 15 references and 9 resources.) (BT)

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Issue Paper

CHARACTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

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SERVICE-LEARNING AND CHARACTER EDUCATION: ONE PLUS ONE IS MORE THAN TWO

> "Talent develops in tranquility, character in the full current of human life."
>
> — *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Parents and politicians call for it. Miss America spotlights it. Presidents support and want to fund it. Students say their schools and their lives are changed by it. All across the country, the push for a civil society is finding a focus in schools, where tools such as character education and service-learning are teaching students to be not just learners but citizens of their wider world.

The connection between service and character is a natural fit in today's schools. An important facet of school reform in recent years has been the push to connect academics to the "real world." Science classes get out into the marsh and test values that weigh issues of environmental protection vs. local economic growth; math students learn how to handle money responsibly, and history students interview senior citizens. In the same way, service-learning gives students a living laboratory to develop and test the character traits they are learning in the classroom, such as respect, compassion and responsibility.

The link between service and character is not new. Volunteers of all ages frequently say they believe they learn more and reap greater rewards than the people they are serving. Many school staff members believe this too, which is why many schools focus on both character and service.

But while there is widespread agreement that educating students to become good citizens is crucial, there are differences on how to make that goal a reality. Some people are calling for character development as the way to produce moral, caring students. Others say that service-learning is the key to connecting students to their communities and one another. Many educators, however, are finding the two approaches go hand in hand.

> "Intelligence plus character — that is the true goal of education."
>
> — *Martin Luther King Jr.*

Character Education

Character education is a national movement to create schools that foster ethical, responsible and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character. The emphasis is on common values such as respect, honesty, fairness, compassion, responsibility, civility, courage and kindness. The goal is to help students develop socially, ethically and academically by infusing character development into every aspect of the school culture and curriculum.

One measure of how character education is growing is the number of states that have passed legislation; as of January 2001, nine states and Puerto Rico have mandated character education through legislation, and 11 more states plus the District of Columbia have policies that recommend some form of character education (Education Commission of the States, 2001). Another measure of the growing recognition of character education is its rising prominence on the national scene. Miss America 2001, Angela Perez Baraquio, chose character education and the teachers responsible for it as the centerpiece of her

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platform. And in his first week in office, President George W. Bush released his education plan, which calls for increased funding for character education as part of the effort to encourage safe schools.

There is no single script for effective character education, but there are some basic principles. The Character Education Partnership (CEP), a national nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of individuals and organizations, developed the following principles to serve as guidelines. These guidelines state that effective, comprehensive character education:

- Promotes core ethical values
- Teaches students to understand, care about and act upon these core ethical values
- Encompasses all aspects of the school culture
- Fosters a caring school community
- Offers opportunities for moral action
- Supports academic achievement
- Develops intrinsic motivation
- Includes whole-staff involvement
- Requires positive leadership of staff and students
- Involves parents and community members
- Assesses results (CEP, 1995).

> "We lay the groundwork in elementary school. It's so neat when you walk into the middle schools or high school — the students already know what the values are and how to practice them in their lives."
>
> *— Christine Heisler, Character Education Council chairperson, Mount Lebanon School District, Pennsylvania*

Service-Learning

As schools seek ways to connect students with the world around them, service-learning in schools is on the rise. A recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) shows that 83% of U.S. high schools offered service-learning opportunities in 1999, up from 27% in 1984. The study predicted that more than 13 million students in North America would be engaged in community service-learning by 2000 (NCES, 1999).

As the name implies, service-learning integrates community service into the classroom curriculum. It involves learning and using academic skills, performing needed service, reflecting on and learning from experiences, and producing real results that serve the student's own community. In service-learning:

- Young people are encouraged to take the lead, at a level appropriate to their age and skills, in responding to genuine needs in their school or community.
- Teachers are facilitators of a service experience that relates the academic subject to community life.
- Service opportunities are accompanied by regular, structured and unstructured opportunities to reflect upon the meaning and significance of the service.
- Service-learning is built on partnerships within the school or between the school and community.

Service-learning has been found to help students develop intellectually, as well as into good citizens. When the community becomes the classroom and young people learn not just from books but also from their own experiences, they learn basic academic and critical-thinking skills in new and potentially powerful ways.

Service efforts are gaining attention on the national policy level and enjoying bipartisan support. In the process, they develop a sense of civic responsibility and an ability to work cooperatively for the greater good. During his presidency, Bill Clinton started the Corporation for National Service, which governs volunteer programs such as Americorps. In his early days in office, Bush assigned his campaign's top domestic policy adviser, Stephen Goldsmith, to guide the Corporation for National Service and create a new organization to solicit private funds for charitable and volunteer work (Milbank, 2001).

> "Education goals that [President Bush] has spoken of are accountability and standards, while developing civic responsibility and character education. How do you measure those? In my view, service-learning is a great way to do that."
>
> *– Amy Cohen, acting director, Department of Service-Learning, "Schools Strive to Align Service-Learning Into Academic Standards,"* School Board News, *January 25, 2001*

Research shows that effective service-learning experiences foster values and behaviors that are the goal of character education. For instance, studies show that students who take part in service-learning strengthen their academic skills, civic attitudes and citizenship skills (Brandeis, 1998; Hedin and Conrad, 1990). In addition, there is evidence that service-learning provides the key experiences that lead to resiliency and helps develop a sense of social responsibility (Berman, 1997).

RMC Research Corporation recently produced a compilation of evidence from the past 10 years on the impact service-learning has on students, schools and communities (Billig, 2000). The results indicated that service-learning experience helps students to realize the goals of character education:

- Service-learning helps develop students' sense of civic and social responsibility, as well as their citizenship skills.
- Teachers and students have greater respect for one another.
- School climate improves.
- Students are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on students' interpersonal development and the ability to relate to culturally diverse groups.
- Service-learning provides an avenue for students to become active, positive contributors to society.

Similarly, research on the better-known character education initiatives shows that when consistent work with the guidelines listed above, students exhibit more "pro-social" behavior, substance abuse declines, disciplinary problems decreases and academic achievement improves (CEP, 1999).

Service Supports Character

Service-learning has been found to be an excellent motivator of character development and one of the most effective methods for teaching and learning the lessons of character. It provides young people with the opportunity to act on and affirm the values they learn in school. And, as with any other academic subject, putting the ideas into practice makes them come alive.

In the 1997 report *Their Best Selves: Building Character Education and Service Learning Together in the Lives of Young People,* author Bruce Boston pointed out four reasons why service and character fit together so well:

1. Service-learning renders concrete the abstractions of moral teaching. Engaging in service confronts a young person with immediate and real needs in the real world. Seeing needs "up close and personal" in itself places a moral claim on a younger person, eliciting important moral questions about our society's solutions to problems.
2. The emotional satisfaction students gain from being involved in service to others and from a job well done imparts feelings of self-worth that reverberate beyond their lives. When students learn valuable skills in the process of service-learning projects, those skills can translate into career-forming and life-changing experiences.
3. The structure of service-learning fosters the development of such values as self-discipline, collaboration and team building, respect for the quality of work done, and respect for others.
4. The experience of many service-learning teachers and programs is that providing the opportunity to serve others can build character in young people and move them in a positive direction (Boston, 1997).

Angela Perez Baraquio, Miss America 2001, has chosen to dedicate her efforts to communicating the importance of teaching values while valuing teachers. She recently took a moment to discuss her perspectives on character education and service-learning.

"Most places I go usually have a character education program or ask how they can have one. I tell them it has to be infused into the curriculum, not just an add-on. Community members and teachers need to be trained and involved in a comprehensive character education effort. Many places are coupling that with service-learning. It becomes real to students when you put character education together with service-learning. It's not just posters on the wall or banners in the hall."

Character Supports Service

Character education provides a context in which ethical and social development are taken seriously, which in turn fosters a climate where service-learning can thrive. Because one focus of character education is the need for opportunities to take moral action, the study of character leads to the performance of service. For example, of the 10 schools named as 2000 National Schools of Character by the Character Education Partnership, seven feature service in their school programs.

Service and character work well together in individual schools. One example is Kennerly Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri, which has found that service is a natural outgrowth of teaching character. The school's focus on character is coordinated by the CHARACTER*plus* Team, a group of staff members charged with ensuring that character education is implemented in all facets of the school. In-school service gives rise to community service, as well. The lessons in character and service have resulted in decreased discipline problems and academic gains. "I don't feel like I discipline children any more," says Amy Richards, CHARACTER*plus* coordinator. "And because I'm spending less time disciplining, I have more time to teach" (CEP, 2000).

Service-learning and character education can be even more powerful when implemented districtwide. For example, over the past six years, the Hudson Public School District 7 in Massachusetts has taken steps to teach civility, character and social responsibility through instructional strategies focused on the themes of empathy, ethics and service. The goal is to embed these into the fabric of each child's school experience from kindergarten to 12th grade. Toward that goal:

- Empathy is taught using an empathy development and anger management program produced by the Committee for Children entitled "Second Step." This program is supplemented with conflict resolution material from Educators for Social Responsibility. Second Step includes 30 lessons per grade, as well as a parent component. In addition, Hudson is implementing the Responsive Classroom program that provides teachers with classroom management strategies that help create a caring classroom environment.
- To teach ethics, Hudson has selected material from an elementary literature program developed by the Developmental Studies Center in which students read literature that portrays "prosocial" themes. In addition, they have created a core 9th-grade English/social studies civics course whose essential question is: "What is a just society?"
- To encourage civility and civic responsibility, Hudson Public Schools has made a commitment to integrating community service-learning into the curriculum. In 1999-2000, 85% of students were involved in service-learning, and the district is committed to reaching 100% of students. The district is creating a consistent, systemwide approach so that an ethic of service and care is sustained at each grade level from kindergarten to graduation (Berman, 1998).

Service-learning and character education can play a role outside the public school system, as well. For instance, the Army's Junior ROTC Program has integrated service-learning and character education in order to help realize their mission "to motivate young people to be better citizens." The JROTC program uses the Lions-Quest Skills for Action program to train its instructors and has made a commitment to America's Promise to ingrain service-learning into its curriculum. It also has formed a partnership with Junior Achievement, Inc. to provide service-learning opportunities for cadets to work with younger students in classrooms around the country.

Pennsylvania District Combines Character and Service

In the Mount Lebanon School District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, character education permeates all levels of instruction, sports and community service. For instance:

- Elementary schools participate in a mixture of classroom service and schoolwide projects that are linked to academics and character education. Students assemble before and after a project to create and review goals, write letters to recipients of donations, and create service portfolios where they write about what they did and how they felt about the service.
- In the middle grades, student leaders create a pamphlet listing service opportunities for their peers under the banners of "cooperation, community and caring." Students who are academically and socially at risk participate in the Strive program. As the students advance in the program, they assume more responsibility for leadership and community service.
- Service at the high school level reached such proportions that the district hired full-time directors to coordinate the tutorial center and community-service activities. Many of the projects involve tutoring younger students and those with special needs.
- A Character Education Council, composed of a representative from each of the district's seven schools, meets regularly to review district service-learning efforts, ways to involve parents, methods for training new teachers and other strategies for implementing character education. The council recently completed a character education mission statement and goals for the community. "We are looking at action plans that bring in religious organizations, the sports alliance, government, business, and child care providers," says Christine Heisler, Character Education Council chairperson. "We want to unite our efforts so we are delivering the same message: We care about character" (CEP, 2000).

Policy Options

Many educators, administrators and policymakers have found character education and service-learning to be important tools in their efforts to help students become active, effective citizens. The two approaches together can help make the best use of funds and resources and help each program to meet its goals.

> "The fact is students benefit both academically and socially from an education that integrates challenging academics with a commitment to creating a caring and civil community. This is not an either/or choice ... we cannot only enrich our academic content but also nurture an ethic of care and service in young people."
>
> *— Sheldon Berman, superintendent, Hudson (Massachusetts) Public Schools*

Policy Challenges

Not everyone supports character education or service-learning; however, some opponents see character education as a veiled way for a minority to force its own religious or personal values on public school students. For example, in Washington State a bill to require character education passed 88-10 in the House but then died in committee in the Senate. "As soon as you say character, it's a red flag to some people," said State Representative Dave Quall, the bill's sponsor. "The way to approach this fear is to talk about creating a climate where people are going to be thoughtful and affirming, and be able to resolve conflicts and work through disputes."

Ironically, the role of the community is both a strength and a weakness of service-learning and character education efforts. While some people are concerned that character or service may be directed by only a few teachers or community members, these efforts are more successful with communitywide input and involvement.

> "It's a powerful way to build community involvement by getting the whole community in on deciding on the universal character traits they want to see for their children."
>
> *— Washington State Representative Dave Quall*

One way proponents try to build support for character education and service-learning is by attempting to emphasize the kinds of values that character education teaches and service-learning can make real. These include a sense of responsibility, both to oneself and to the larger community; understanding of and engagement with the democratic processes of our nation; and an ability to think carefully and take action in response to difficult questions.

"Good manners are free. Good manners and a respectful attitude cost nothing to the taxpayer, yet the benefits of a more courteous and more civilized society are priceless. In fact, many employers tell me that they are looking for graduates who are not only proficient in reading, writing and arithmetic — but who also possess the values of respect, honesty and responsibility that are important in the workplace.... While our schools must teach the skills and knowledge our children need to compete in the global economy of the 21st Century, our children must also learn the timeless truths that have been nurtured in our communities."

— Governor Jim Hodges, South Carolina

Policy Support

Educators, administrators and policymakers interested in character education and service-learning can address them in policies that support both efforts. Similarly, funding for character education can be linked to service, and vice versa. (For an example, see the request for proposals on Integrating Character Education and the Curriculum at the Massachusetts Department of Education Web site, www.state.ma.us).

The Character Education Partnership offers guidelines and strategies for state policymakers who wish to draft legislation about character education. These guidelines have been adapted here to include service-learning:

- Legislation should encourage character education and service-learning generally rather than specify a particular approach or program. These efforts work best when local schools and communities work together to identify the core moral values to be taught in their school and the community needs to be met.
- Legislation should ensure that service-learning and character education are thoughtfully integrated into existing state programs and frameworks. School leaders and citizens need to understand that these programs are not a quick fix or add-on, but are instead an essential part of the mission of public schools.
- State leaders should encourage comprehensive approaches to character education and service-learning that involve all aspects of school culture and curriculum. Effective plans address modeling of core civic virtues by adults and youth, school environment, classroom culture, curriculum, teaching strategies, discipline, school procedures and evaluation on all grade levels.
- School leaders should be encouraged to include all of the key stakeholders in the community — especially students and parents — as they develop a comprehensive character and service mission and program.
- Development of citizens through character education and service-learning should be implemented at all grade levels. What is begun in the early years should be reinforced throughout a child's education.
- Legislation should be tied to staff development funding so administrators and teachers may get the training and materials they need to create effective schools of character.

In addition, proponents of character education should meet with opponents to reach a consensus on what would be an acceptable way of helping students develop good character.

For more information about character education and service-learning, contact the Compact for Learning and Citizenship at the Education Commission of the States (303-299-3636) or the Character Education Partnership (202-296-7743). Also see the Resources section at the end of this guide.

Character and Service Come Together in Maryland High School

South Carroll High School, in Sykesville, Maryland, was named one of the 2000 National Schools of Character by the Character Education Partnership (CEP). A closer look at the school and its community shows why character education and service-learning go hand in glove.

With a student body of over 1,500 students and more than 100 faculty members, South Carroll's academic curriculum reflects an emphasis on character. For example, students in one science class are responsible for designing research projects from start to finish, including writing grants. These projects have included environmental conservation in the Chesapeake Bay and designing and building a large, wheelchair-accessible wetlands trail behind the school. To date, students have secured more than $100,000 in grants for such projects.

The school also has a full-time mediation counselor, a "quote for the day" — addressing character traits — that is incorporated into lessons and assignments, and an annual student leadership conference with representatives from every social group on campus. The school's "student of the month" program, designed by teachers, was met with a "teacher of the month" program designed by students. The criteria for both awards focus in part on character issues, such as how well the person listens and how well they go "the extra mile."

These programs helped garner the school the 1999 Maryland Blue Ribbon Award, recognizing exemplary academic achievement and a positive teaching environment, and the 1999 Governor's Green School Award for efforts to improve the environment.

In the 1998-99 school year, when a student was diagnosed with leukemia and was in dire need of a bone marrow transplant, the school responded with one of the most cohesive acts of service in its history, involving every school organization and many community members. In the end, over 156 people were tested and registered as bone marrow transplant donors, and the school community worked as a team to raise $20,000 to help with the family's medical bills.

Despite receiving the needed transplant, the student passed away the following school year. "It was another life lesson the kids unfortunately had to learn," says Bonnie McElroy, chair of the School Improvement Team. "Weathering tragedy together was a real growing experience. We learned that if we are fortunate in this life to have what we need, we have an obligation to give back and help others" (CEP, 2000).

Public schools have always had a platform and obligation to provide an opportunity for students to acquire good character. In recent years, there has been a clarion call for young people to learn the habits of heart and mind that lead to character and connections with their communities through service. As Bruce Boston said: "Powerful connections between service-learning and character education are deeply embedded in the inevitable linkages students make between the integrity of the educational process they are involved in and their personal integrity — that each is, in fact, inseparable from the other."

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Resources

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www.cortland.edu/www/c4n5rs/
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Education Commission of the States
www.ecs.org
303-299-3644

Character Education Partnership
www.character.org
202-296-7743

Corporation for National Service
www.cns.gov
202-606-5000

Learning In Deed
www.learningindeed.org
202-778-1040

National Dropout Prevention Center
www.dropoutprevention.org
864-656-2599

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu
800-808-SERV

National Youth Leadership Council
www.nylc.org
651-631-3672

Youth Service America
www.ysa.org or www.SERVEnet.org
202-296-2992

About the Collaborators

This paper was produced in collaboration with the Character Education Partnership, Esther Schaffer, executive director; Hudson Public Schools, Sheldon Berman, superintendent; the Compact for Learning and Citizenship, Terry Pickeral, executive director; and Elizabeth Holman, freelance writer and mediator.

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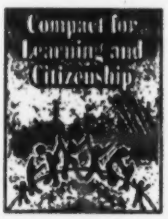
CHARACTER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) is a nonpartisan coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to developing moral character and civic virtue in our nation's youth as one means of creating a more compassionate and responsible society.

CEP is not affiliated with any party or creed. It is a nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization dedicated to the idea that character and education are natural partners in helping children become ethical, responsible adults. CEP's members hold that core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, and honesty can both be a matter of consensus and a model for our youth. We are committed to the practical implementation of character education throughout the learning process.

While CEP's primary focus is on young people, it understands that the problems affecting our youth reflect the broader social and economic problems of our country as a whole and that it is the responsibility of all adults to model good character and to help strengthen civic and moral foundations.

The Compact for Learning and Citizenship (CLC), a project of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), provides K-12 school leaders, legislators and other education stakeholders with resources, profiles and strategies to integrate service-learning through practice and policy. District superintendents and chief state school officers are invited to join. The CLC Web site (www.ecs.org/clc) also provides links to other organizations, clearinghouses, publications and resources. Contact Terry Pickeral, executive director, at 303-299-3636 or tpickeral@ecs.org, or Lou Myers, project coordinator, 303-299-3644 or lmyers@ecs.org.



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